Is psychology a science philosophy essay

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Now that we have proposed the question, it is important to define psychology and science and understand the definitions of each. Wikipedia defines psychology as: the science of mind and behavior. Its immediate goal is to understand humanity by both discovering general principles and exploring specific cases, and its ultimate aim is to benefit society. Now that we know that psychology is the science of mind and behavior, it is time to discover how the definition of science lends some insight into helping answer our question. Wikipedia states that sscience refers to a system of acquiring knowledge. This system uses observation and experimentation to describe and explain natural phenomena. The term science also refers to the organized body of knowledge people have gained using that system. Less formally, the word science often describes any systematic field of study or the knowledge gained from it. So if psychology is the observational study of people and science uses observation and experimentation to describe and explain then this basis can lend to the argument that psychology can be a science. In order to prove this assertion we need to look at the historical background of psychology, differences in psychology and the relation of science.

Psychology was not always a separate science. Its birthday, as a separate science, apart from philosophy and physiology wasn’t until 1879 when the first psychology lab was founded. This new emergence happened because of German Professor, Wilhelm Wundt, who is considered to be the founder of Psychology.

While many of the early philosophers relied heavily on methods like logic and observation, the psychologists of today tend to use methods to study and

come to conclusions about the human behavior and thought. Physiology also made large contributions towards the eventual emergence of psychology as a science. Early physiology research on behavior and brain had a very dramatic impact on psychology as it is today, ultimately leading to the application of many scientific methodologies that study the human behavior and thought.

The 19th century brought lots of progress to the foundation of psychology. The creation of Functionalism focused on how the human behavior works towards helping people function comfortably in their respective environments. Functionalists use methods like direct observation. The functionalists however stressed on the fact that consciousness is an ever changing and more continuous process. Functionalism is debunked in today’s psychology standards but its influence has been felt through the future generations of psychologists.

Another major historical influence on psychology was Sigmund Freud. Sigmund Freud coined the term “ psychoanalysis” in 1896. He established one of the major influences on psychology today. He emphasized the importance of unconscious mental activity. His theories on the inner workings of the human mind, which seemed so revolutionary at the turn of the century, are now widely accepted by most schools of psychological thought.

Psychoanalysis is widely disputed, but perhaps it is necessary to return to the founder of psychoanalysis himself. Freud (1949) wrote in his Outline of Psychoanalysis, “ the teachings of psychoanalysis are based on an

incalculable number of observations and experiences, and only someone who has repeated those observations on himself and on others is in a position to arrive at a judgment of his own upon it.” (p. 11) Its method of data collection relied heavily on interpreting discussion, dreams and fantasies, actions, case studies and a limited amount of experimentation. One of the main points of science is that it states a theory, derives a hypothesis and makes observations or uses the scientific method. Freud’s psychoanalysis was more of an interpretation and did not lend itself to this model therefore it is not a true science.

With the emergence of the 20th century major changes took place with the evolution of psychology. Behaviorism was born as another school of thought that emphasized observable behavior. Wasn’t observation part of the definition of science? It was part of the definition of science but it is only a portion of the scientific method.

This now brings us to psychology of today. There are many different types of psychology and they all lend themselves to discovering and interpreting information by different means. Social psychology is concerned with the effects of social situations on human behavior. Personality theorists study individual behavior. Comparative psychologists study animal behaviors across the range of species Physiological psychologists are concerned with the biological basis of behavior. Developmental psychologists study principles and processes responsible for change throughout life. Cognitive psychologists investigate memory, thought, problem solving, and the psychological aspects of learning. Analysis of behavior studies the conditions under which a behavior can be learned and the situations that cause that

behavior to occur. Learning is an area of psychology exploring how new behaviors are learned and maintained. Clinical psychologists study ways to help individuals and groups of individuals change their behavior. Industrial and organizational psychologists are concerned with the physical and social aspects of people’s work environments as they affect work output. Community psychologists use scientific methods to study and solve social problems.

What distinguishes science in general and psychology specifically is the testing of theories. From theory, we develop specific, testable hypotheses. If we cannot develop testable hypotheses from a theory, it is near useless in the pursuit of scientific knowledge. Additionally, it is important that results of hypothesis testing be replicated by other researchers; if it only happened once, it never really happened.

If psychology relates to science we need to know the definition of the scientific method and what means psychology uses in its methods of experimentation and research to prove our statement.

WordIQ online defines the scientific method as: the scientific method or process that is fundamental to the scientific investigation and acquisition of new knowledge based upon physical evidence. Science manages new assertions about our world with theories, hypotheses and observations. Predictions from these theories are tested by experiment. If a prediction turns out correct, the theory survives, but if a prediction fails the theory fails. Any theory which is strong enough to make verifiable predictions can then be tested scientifically in this way. These are the underlying methods of

scientific practice. With them scientists determine which theories, hypotheses and observations are true. The scientific method is essentially an extremely cautious means of building a supportable, evidenced understanding of our world.

Psychology used rationalism in its early days to investigate behavior and basically the approach was that you thought of an idea then came up with an idea as to why it may be that way. As you can see this was not a fool proof method or very scientific in deriving a proven answer. Then came along Empiricism and it was based on using the five senses to gather information. This was the light bulb that marked the beginning of modern day research that is used in psychology today. Even though, modern psychologists prefer to use more objective scientific methods to understand, explain, and predict human behavior. The problem with labeling psychology a true science is that with all its progression it is still laden with bias.

Some argue that psychology has progressed into a science but again others argue that it is still more an opinion than refuted with true scientific methods. Sam Vaknin, Ph. D has written many books on the topic of psychology and he states, “ Psychology is not an exact science, nor can it ever be. This is because its “ raw material” (humans and their behavior as individuals and en masse) is not exact. It will never yield natural laws or universal constants (like in physics). Experimentation in the field is constrained by legal and ethical rules. Humans tend to be opinionated, develop resistance, and become self-conscious when observed. Still, psychology is desperately trying to maintain contact with reality and to be thought of as a scientific discipline. It employs observation and

measurement and organizes the results, often presenting them in the language of mathematics. In some quarters, these practices lend it an air of credibility and rigorousness. Others snidely regard these as an elaborate camouflage and a sham. Psychology, they insist, is a pseudo-science. It has the trappings of science but not its substance. ” Another study, trying to prove if psychology was a science came when the American Psychological Association appointed Sigmund Koch to study the research methods of psychology and prove its scientific standing. In 1963 his conclusions were published in a series of books entitled ‘ Psychology: A Study of a Science’. He stated: “ The truth is that psychological statements which describe human behavior or which report results from tested research can be scientific. However, when there is a move from describing human behavior to explaining it there is also a move from science to opinion.” I have to agree with Koch in that psychology does a lot of describing but does not give scientific explanations to those descriptions.

In all the research and trained opinions I have read I haven’t been able to conclude that psychology is a true science. Science is based on facts drawn from theories, hypotheses and observations that are proved to be true with unbiased experiments. I can’t conclude that psychology does not fault because it has a bias and is still more an opinion of human nature. That is gives descriptions of issues within human nature more so than explaining them based on scientific research.